

**Council on Postsecondary Education
Committee on Equal Opportunities
August 20, 2001**

**Equal Opportunity Planning
State Gear-Up Grant – Opportunities for Collaboration**

Children from low-income families are far less likely than their more economically advantaged peers to pursue education after high school. In fact, high academic achievers from low-income families are five times less likely to attend college than their more economically advantaged peers. Many of these students do not receive sufficient encouragement to work hard in school and are not informed early enough to consider continuing their education beyond high school. As a result, they do not plan for college or enroll in the secondary school courses needed to enter college.

Enacted in 1998, GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a federal program intended, through early intervention, to address this significant loss of talent. In September 2000, the Commonwealth of Kentucky was awarded \$10 million in federal GEAR UP funds, matched by \$10 million in state funding.

Administered by the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) and the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), GEAR UP Kentucky includes 36 middle schools, 24 postsecondary institutions, and 14 non-school partners. (See attachment.) The program is structured to coincide with the Department of Education's regional service areas. A coordinating postsecondary institution serves each GEAR UP region. These institutions include Murray State University, Western Kentucky University, University of Louisville, Northern Kentucky Technical College, Kentucky State University, Eastern Kentucky University, Morehead State University, and Hazard Community College.

Participating schools were selected on the basis of their low-income enrollment and geographic diversity. At least 50 percent of the students in each participating school are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, and GEAR UP schools are located in each of KDE's regional service areas. This year, the project serves 5,512 seventh-grade students. The students targeted by the Committee on Equal Opportunities comprise one-subset of GEAR UP students.

The GEAR UP program approach is unique among federal programs in that it complements existing federal programs by starting earlier, staying with children through high school graduation, transforming schools, supporting college scholarships, leveraging local resources, and strengthening state efforts. GEAR UP Kentucky's mission is to support and expand Kentucky's education infrastructure and increase the college completion rate of all students. The program will focus on middle school students from low-income families.

The success of GEAR UP Kentucky will be determined based on how well GEAR UP schools respond to three challenges – need, effectiveness of strategic action, and partnerships. Nationally, GEAR UP is modeled on programs that are comprehensive and provide academic support, mentoring, promise of public and private aid for tuition for students, and involves whole families. Further, both national and local data suggest five priority areas for GEAR UP Kentucky: linking college awareness and preparation to success in college, ensuring student access to academic rigor in their coursework, engaging parents to mobilize improvements in schools, increasing access to adequate financial support for college, and supporting student success by providing an academic safety net.

When school opens for the fall 2001, GEAR UP Kentucky will serve two cohorts of students – a new seventh-grade cohort and the rising 2001 cohort who will be 8th graders. Many implementation activities will begin with the opening day of school but activities such as back-to-school night programs, home visits, and student assemblies are already taking place. In November, the first annual GEAR UP Expo will bring as many as 11,000 students to the University of Kentucky's Memorial Coliseum in Lexington.

Staff preparation by Yvonne Lovell